

The history of the electoral college politics essay



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The Electoral College is a body of electors chosen by the political parties in each state to elect the President of the U. S . The Electoral College was created because the Framers were wary of giving the people the power to directly elect the President. They felt the people were not educated enough to elect the national leader. The Founding Fathers established the Electoral College as a compromise between election of the President by a vote in Congress and election of the President by a popular vote. The presidential election became a collection of state elections, which would result in a national candidate. The Electoral College consists of 538 electors, which are divided up between the states according the number of representatives in the House, plus 2 votes for each of the Senate members. The political parties pick electors for each state. A majority of 270 electoral votes is required to elect the President. Article Two of the Constitution states, “ Each state shall appoint, in such manner as the Legislature thereof may direct a number of electors, equal to the whole number of Senators and Representatives to which the States may be entitled in the Congress.” (U. S. Constitution, art. 2, sec. 2.)

Although ballots list the names of the presidential candidates, citizens do not vote for the President directly. People are voting for an elector in the college who, in turn, will vote on the states behalf. These electors’ votes will decide who the President is, and not necessarily the popular vote. These presidential electors in turn cast electoral votes for the Presidential Candidate.

The winner take all system, also known as the plurality voting system, awards all of the Electoral College votes to the winning presidential

candidate from each state. In this voting system the single winner is the person with the most votes, there is no requirement that the winner gain an absolute majority of votes. The winner will take all the votes and the loser will get none. For example, all 55 of California's Electoral votes go to the winner of the popular vote in the state election, even if the margin of victory is only 50.1 percent to 49.9 percent.

The Electoral College system plays a role in how Presidential Candidate's campaign by making the candidates focus all their attention on getting electoral votes. Parties focus on the electors because they have to convince the electors to vote for them not so much as the people themselves. The parties also concentrate on large states that have more electoral votes than the small states. Big states with the most electoral votes are the key to winning the election so they concentrate their power in them.

Most commonly, Presidential candidates also heavily concentrate their attention on a handful of closely divided battleground states, or swing states. These states don't have a lot of electoral votes but still will decide the outcome of the race because they do not favor a particular political party or change their preference each election. In these states, campaigning will have the most impact since a small change in popular votes could result in a big win in electoral votes. Consequently, other states considered either safe or hopelessly lost and are largely ignored in the campaign. In the elections, small states and swing states are overrepresented in the Electoral College while leaving the rest of the nation's voters on the sidelines.

The Electoral College hinders 3rd party candidates because the 3rd party is over shadowed by the majority vote, so 3rd parties almost never get electoral votes. Winner take all minimizes the influence of third parties. However, this can also deny fair representation to positive 3rd parties. For example if a 3rd party gets 25% of the votes in one state those votes does not matter because of the winner take all majority of the Electoral College. The power of a 3rd party is in spoiling an election by taking votes from one of the major parties that is most like it. To avoid this, major parties may take up causes and ideas from the 3rd party to keep them from becoming too popular.

Although, 62% of people said they would change the electoral college system, over the past 200 years over 700 proposals have been introduced in Congress to reform or eliminate the Electoral College, (Office of the Federal Register, Electoral College: Frequently Asked Questions." Archives) but very little has been done to change it. The Electoral College has not been abolished because the small states and swing states would have to give up power and be equal to everyone else. The House of Representatives passed an amendment in 1969, backed by President Richard Nixon, to directly elect the president (niemanwatchdog. org Is it time to do away with the undemocratic Electoral-College system?) But the amendment was blocked in the Senate, in part by Southern senators who opposed any changes they saw as weakening states' rights.

The Electoral College system can end up putting in office someone who lost the popular vote, which is contrary to democracy. For example the Presidential election in 2000, George Bush won the electoral votes and Al

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Gore won the popular vote. (Oyez) The fairest solution is to have a Presidential election solely on a popular vote. This will solve the disconnect of the American people and election process. Candidates would need to care about voters across the nation, not just undecided voters in a handful of swing states and the large states. Almost all Americans think that democracy is “ One Person, One Vote,” and all votes are count equally, but The Electoral College violates that fundamental American principle. Some people do not participate in elections because they know that their vote will not matter in the Presidential elections.

“ One Person One Vote” means that each person has an equal amount of representation in government. Government should be for the people, not the electors deciding the fate of the country (Annenberg Classroom). Every vote, by everyone, would be relevant and equal in Presidential elections. The election should change from a winner take all system to a proportional system. The winner does not need to reach a majority, just a plurality. The candidates with the most overall percent of votes will win. This will give a stronger chance for 3rd party groups in the elections, by still having their votes count and not be outshined by the two major parties.

Another improvement is the use of ranked base voting where voters order the candidates from least preferred to most preferred. To be practical, the top three choices could be chosen. The election is decided by picking everyone’s top choice and removing the candidate with the least votes. This process is repeated so that candidate is removed and the top preferences are only counted for each elimination round. This allows a voter to pick the candidate they want the most for their top choice followed by a slightly

lesser desired candidate. And the third choice could be a main party safety candidate. This allows for a 3rd party candidate to come in and not steal votes away from a similar party. The system has been used in San Francisco since 2004. It's been proposed everywhere from Los Angeles to Modesto, but only the three Alameda County cities have signed on for it. (Williams, Lance California Watch)

“ The Electoral College does not provide a straightforward process for selecting the President. Instead, it can be extraordinarily complex and has the potential to undo the people's will at many points in the long journey from the selection of electors to counting their votes in Congress,” (George Edwards). The government should be for the people and the Electoral College is not since it treats people unequally. Many American people want the Electoral College abolished, but so little has been done to improve the outdated system. It makes the candidates campaign unfairly, making them focusing on swing states and forgetting all other states. The winner takes all system over shadows 3rd parties giving them unfair representation in the elections. The US needs to elect Presidents by popular vote; it is fair to all people. “ One Person One Vote” should be used to ensure equality in voting. The American people should be able to choose their leader as equals.

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